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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002132

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SUBJECT: SERBIAN FM JEREMIC REAFFIRMS TIES TO RUSSIA; GOR
DOWNPLAYS KARADZIC ARREST

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.
4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Russia welcomed Serbian FM Vuk Jeremic's July 17 visit to Moscow as reaffirming the importance of Russia as a partner in the face of the new Serbian government's pro-European integration policy. The GOR reiterated full support for Serbia's stance on Kosovo, and agreed to back Belgrade's proposal to ask the International Court of Justice to rule on the legal validity of Kosovo's declaration of independence. Russia also expressed willingness to support talks on reconfiguring UNMIK to allow a bigger EU role, provided Serbia agreed, the UN Security Council approved the change, and the reconfiguration was not characterized as being in support of the Ahtisaari plan. Jeremic also reassured Russia that Serbia would ratify the oil and gas agreement reached under the previous government. Calling the arrest of Serbian war criminal Karadzic "a purely internal Serbian matter," the MFA expressed the "hope" that his investigation and trial would be impartial, commenting that there were "repeated instances" when the Tribunal had not been fair. End summary.

EU Integration Main Goal, but Russia still Key Partner

12. (C) MFA 4th CIS Deputy Director Vladimir Ulasevich and Serbian embassy officials told us FM Jeremic had come to Moscow to coordinate policies, following the formation of the new Serbian government. In addition to reaffirming that Russia was a primary partner for Serbia, the major issues discussed by Jeremic and FM Lavrov were economic cooperation and Kosovo.

13. (C) Ulasevich said Russia welcomed Serbia's European integration aspirations, because it would benefit Russia to have an ally and economic partner like Serbia in the EU. He stressed that Jeremic had said the new government's position on Kosovo had not changed, and Belgrade would continue to fight with all means short of force for the preservation of Serbia's territorial integrity. Ulasevich said Russia would also continue to support Serbia on Kosovo.

ICJ Ruling

14. (C) Ulasevich said Jeremic had sought GOR support for Serbia's proposal to ask the International Court of Justice to rule on the legitimacy of Kosovo's declaration of independence. When asked about the GOR's response, Ulasevich said Russia "thinks it would be appropriate to ask for such a ruling."

15. (C) Ulasevich told us Jeremic had said Belgrade was "doubly prepared" to talk about the modalities for reconfiguration of the UN Mission in Kosovo to "accommodate the desire of the EU to play a bigger role." The GOR was prepared to support Belgrade in this, Ulasevich said, but stressed that Serbia wanted the continuation of a UN presence within the framework of UNMIK, but with a larger role for the EU. Any change would need to be approved by the UNSC, Ulasevich said, and should not be seen as in accordance with the Ahtisaari plan.

Energy and Economic Cooperation

16. (C) Ulasevich and Embassy officials told us Jeremic reconfirmed Serbia's intention to ratify the oil and gas agreement with Russia, and told Lavrov that Belgrade would welcome Russian participation in other areas of economic activity, including in upcoming privatizations of the national airline and other companies. Jeremic also flagged Serbia's interest in adjusting the Protocol to the 2000 Free Trade Agreement, obtaining visa-free travel to Russia (Serbia already provides visa-free travel to Russians), and holding further talks on where the South Stream pipeline should go.

17. (C) Russia agreed to participate in the restoration of historical and cultural sites in Serbia and to provide humanitarian assistance. (Note. Media July 23 reported

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Russia was sending a 60-person team to Serbia that day to aid in mine-clearing.)

Karadzic Arrest

18. (C) The MFA used the arrest of war criminal Radovan Karadzic to repeat complaints that the War Crimes Tribunal was biased against Serbs. Ulasevich told us that while Russia believed all war criminals should be brought to justice, the Tribunal was not even-handed. He argued that Bosnian and especially Kosovar Albanian criminals were not being arrested or were being pardoned, pointing to the acquittal of Bosnian Naser Oric. A statement posted on the MFA website said the arrest was exclusively an internal matter for Serbia, but piously expressed the "hope that the investigation and judicial process will be impartial, given the repeated instances in which the Tribunal has not been impartial." It said the court had acquitted and released Bosnians and Kosovar Albanians whose involvement in military crimes was unquestioned, citing Ramus Haradinai. Lavrov reiterated the need for a "fair" trial, following his meeting with Secretary Rice in Singapore. Most newspapers reported the arrest factually, though centrist Izvestiya headlined "Who is Radovan Karadzic, a Hero, a Criminal or a Victim," with nationalist politicians painting Karadzic as a victim of Western political intrigues.

RUBIN